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Number of Students Doing Well on AP Tests Is Up, but Racial Gaps Persist

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A greater proportion of minority students in the high-school class of 2008 took Advanced Placement examinations than did those in previous classes, and the overall number of students scoring well also rose, says a [report](#) released on Wednesday by the College Board. But disparities persist, with this year's report showing that African-American students are still greatly underrepresented.

The College Board, a nonprofit association, administers 37 Advanced Placement, or AP, exams that allow high-school students to earn credit or test out of introductory courses at many colleges. The tests are graded on a scale from 1 to 5, with a score of 3 or higher generally considered predictive of college success.

According to "The 5th Annual AP Report to the Nation," a quarter of the nation's three million public high-school graduates took at least one AP exam, and 15.2 percent of them scored 3 or higher. That's up from 2007, when 14.4 percent of the 2.9 million students scored 3 or higher.

Revised results for 2007 were included in this year's report. Last year, the College Board reported that 15.2 percent of students in the class of 2007 scored a 3 or above, and it adjusted that figure in the report released Wednesday to 14.4 percent. The change resulted from revised data from the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education on the number of new graduates in 2007.

Gaston Caperton, president of the College Board, said the trend of greater achievement among students as a whole has a positive economic effect on families. "It is the bridge to college success, which includes graduating on time," he said in a written statement.

According to the board, students who take Advanced Placement tests are more likely than other students to graduate from college within four years.

Inequities in the success of minority students persisted this year, with those students continuing to make up a smaller percentage of the successful student group than they do of the graduating class. Eighteen states closed such "equity and excellence" gaps for Hispanic students in 2008, but no state did for African-American ones.

Hispanic students made up 15.4 percent of the class of 2008, and 14.8 percent of AP test takers. That is up from 14.7 and 14 percent, respectively, in 2007. This year, Hispanic students made up 13.8 percent of exam takers who scored 3 or higher.

In contrast, African-American students represented 14.4 percent of the graduating class in 2008, but only 7.8 percent of the AP test takers. And they accounted for only 3.5 percent of those scoring a 3 or above.

Trevor Packer, vice president for the AP program at the College Board, said that in states where all students had greater success, the government and school districts often had put in place programs—like teacher training specific to AP courses and an increased number of college-preparatory classes—that had a profound affect on scores. In states with high African-American populations, like Alabama and Mississippi, such programs are just being started, he said.

Among states, Maryland had the highest percentage of public-school students scoring at least a 3 on the exam: 23.4 percent. Maine saw the largest increase in the percentage of those who scored a 3 or higher, while Vermont posted the greatest five-year gain.